Christian Century Retirement Party
January 14, 2016

There are moments when life changes, a sea change actually, and nothing is ever the same again. If one is fortunate, or blessed, the change is altogether a good one, healthy, stimulating, life-giving.

A moment like that happened to me in my study at the Fourth Presbyterian Church of Chicago some time in 1998. The long- time, distinguished Editor of the Christian Century, James Wall had announced his retirement and a search committee was at work to find his successor. Two members of that committee, James McClure and Robert Crowe, were interviewing people for suggestions on who might become the new editor. I was one of the people they talked to, several times. Jim McClure President of the Board of Trustees and Bob Crowe, Chair of the Finance Committee for many years, had taken upon themselves stewardship - responsibility for the health and future of the magazine. Their contributions to the Christian Century have been, and still are, enormous, unprecedented, and before I say more I want to thank them for that.

Well, Bob and Jim made an appointment to chat some more about the future of the Christian Century. "We found our person" they announced as soon as we sat down. "Who is it?' I asked, and practically fell out of my chair when they answered, "You. You are the one." I was speechless. Never in my wildest imagination had I thought about becoming a magazine editor, particularly for a very distinguished publication that I admired and respected as much as the Christian Century. " But I already a have a job here" I stammered. Being fine attorneys, both of them, they had anticipated my response. "We know that so we talked with some leaders at Fourth Presbyterian and they agree with us that something new and exciting is exactly what you need. So they are quite willing to allow you to work for the magazine, part time." The rest, as they say, is history.

Fortunately the Christian Century already had on its staff one of the brightest most capable and creative enough journalists around in David Heim. I would be the Editor/Publisher. David would be the Executive Editor and actually run the magazine. I would come to work a part of a real days per week, walk around the office and say "Good morning" to everyone, make sure the coffee was brewing and then go to my office and approve invoices and sign checks.

It worked pretty well. David Heim continues to be the finest professional in the world of religious journalism, absolutely responsible, always thoughtful and creative, guiding the Christian Century as his colleagues to think about the issues that confront people of faith in Amwrican culture and throughout the world. Happily, as the Board of

Trustees thought about the magazine's future they modified slightly the job titles. David will be the magazine's Editor.

Peter Marty becomes the new Publisher and will continue, as I did, his ministry as Pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church of Davenport, Iowa. Choosing Peter was a brilliant decision by the Search Committee and Board of Trustees. Peter is grounded firmly in the church and in the life of a large, lively, public congregation. As a pastor Peter knows, first hand, what people are thinking about, worrying about, struggling with and hoping for. He is also grounded in the great theological tradition of Lutheranism and the Reformation, but with a broad, inclusive worldview. And Peter is grounded firmly in this world when we are challenged to love faithfully, passionately, thoughtfully with great love for God, the world God created, our dear ones and sisters and brothers near and far. That is to say, Peter Marty is a perfect choice.

The Christian Century has been blessed over the years with a staff who believe in what the magazine does and aspires to be, and who consequently bring their very best and most creative gifts to their work. They have become respite colleagues and dear friends to me.

Senior Editors:
Debra Bendis, who among other responsibilities, has been my editor, my first and last and only editor. Debra has taught me to be a more careful writer and she has demonstrated that preachers would do well to have a Debra Bendis in their lives before they preach.

Richard Kaufmann, our Books Editor who retired January 1, and his successor, Elizabeth Palmer.

Associate Editors:
Steve Thorngate and Amy Frykholm.

News Editor:
Celeste Kennel-Schenk

Contributing Editor, Dean Peerman, who has worked for the Christian Century since his graduation from Yale Divinity School in 195..., and quite simply is one of the most careful and thoughtful editors God ever put on the face of the earth, who with Martin Marty marched with Martin Luther King in Selma.

And Martin Marty. One of the best parts of this job was that I got to hang out with Marty and to revel in the high irony that he insisted on calling me "Boss."

Editorial Assistant:
Janet Potter

Poetry Editor:
Jill Pelaez Baumgaertner

Production Assistant:
Diane Mills

Donor Relations:
Janet Milkovich

And our intrepid Marketing Consultant:
Kevin Shanley

Three people warrant special mention and my deep gratitude:

Director of Finance, Maureen Gavin - who could not be more responsible, and frugal, in managing our fiscal affairs.

Art Director, Daniel Richardson who works quietly, almost invisibly behind his big computer in a corner office and somehow performs a biweekly miracle, putting the magazine together, attractively illustrated, and creating those striking covers for each issue.

And Heidi Baumgaertner, whose title is Advertising Manager. She does that with great expertise, but Heidi is also the Office Manager, serves as our event planner, staff social director and all-around "go to" person who has become absolutely vital to the operation.

I am grateful this evening to the Christian Century Board of Trustees which functions smoothly and has assumed increasing responsibility for the magazine and its future. Pater Marty chaired the Board for the past several years and is succeeded by the very capable Steve Shorney.

I am grateful to my friend Dr. M. Craig Barnes, distinguished pastor, theological educator, President of Princeton Theological Seminary, Editor at Large and regular contributor to the Christian Century, and to his wife, Dawn. They honor me by their presence this evening.

Tower Brass, my very favorite music group, part of the outstanding Music and Arts program at Fourth Presbyterian Church and their Artistic Director, Matthew Cummerord. Over the years they not only enriched my personal worship experience but became good friends in the process. I am still their biggest fan.

I am grateful to Heidi Baumgaertner who put this event together, and to my family who have come to be with me this evening.

My wife of 56 years with whom I have shared the great adventure of life together and who I have relied upon in so many ways - including being my most consistent truth teller.

Our five children and spouses:

Diane Buchanan and Richard Andrew of Santa Fe, New Mexico, and Rick' mother Edith Andrew (a generous Christian Century and Tower Brass supporter) of Naples, Florida.

Susan Buchanan and Steven Brown of Oak Park.

John and Nancy Buchanan of Chicago.

Andrew Buchanan and Mary McMahon of Chicago

Brian Buchanan , San Diego.

And a very special treat, my brother, William Paul Buchanan. Bill recently retired after a distinguished career as County Manager, Sedgwick County - Wichita, Kansas, and now lies with his wife, Lynn, in Pittsburgh. PA.

And I am grateful to each of you for your presence this evening.

When I began to think about what I might say this evening, I considered reflecting on the great and interesting moments in the century-plus history of the magazine. There are many of them.

The magazine's strong support of Prohibition in the 1920's and Isolationism in the 30's.

The conflict between founding editor Charles Clayton Morrison and the great theologian Reinhold Niebuhr over Morrison's isolationism and pacifism as war with Fascist Germany and Japan loomed. And Niebuhr's subsequent resignation from the Christian Century masthead to found a rival journal, Christianity and Crisis to reflect his brand of theological/political "Realism."

Martin Luther King's Letter from Birmingham Jail, which he sent to Dean Peerman who recognized its importance, edited it and the Christian Century was the first publication to print it.

In my brief portion of that history there were remarkable experiences that I shall always cherish. One of them happened at the round table in the office lunch room. Poet, Novelist, essayist, Wendell Berry was in town and his good friend Debra Bendis persuaded him to come and talk with the Christian Century editors. Berry was in his late 70's at the time. He had written about the way our market culture's obsession with more - more money, more weapons, more drugs, more of everything, including life expectancy, was so dominant that it had eclipse an older and wiser ideal of a "complete life", not simply longevity but completeness, wholeness. Berry defined a "complete life" as a life in which you "perceived your calling and faithfully followed it, did your work with satisfaction, associated generously with your neighbors and continued, in old age, to be useful".

We asked him that day about his own aging and his hopes for the future. I was so struck by his response that I wrote it down. He said, "For me, at my age the main question is, "Can I be a grateful man as long as I live? Can I remember, in all my days, that I have had a very good life."

Well, that's it then. I am deeply, profoundly grateful tonight.

As I thought about this, and how I should end it, I asked - as I often have over the years, my wife, the truth teller, "What should I say?" Her answer, as always, was straight, succinct and true. "You should say 'Goodbye'".

So .... Goodbye and

Thank you, thank you, thank you.